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NOEL

AN EPIC IN TEN CANTOS

BY GILBERT CANNAN

PART ONE

INTRODUCTORY

LONDON

GRANT RICHARDS LTD

ST MARTIN'S STREET

NOEL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

PETER HOMUNCULUS
LITTLE BROTHER
ROUND THE CORNER
YOUNG EARNEST
OLD MOLE
THREE PRETTY MEN
MENDEL
THE STUCCO HOUSE

PLAYS

FOUR PLAYS
EVERYBODY'S HUSBAND
INQUEST ON PIERROT

WINDMILLS
SAMUEL BUTLER : A Critical Study
SATIRE
THE JOY OF THE THEATRE
FREEDOM

TRANSLATION

JEAN CHRISTOPHE. By Romain Rolland

NOEL

AN EPIC IN TEN CANTOS
BY GILBERT CANNAN

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I INTRODUCTORY

LONDON
GRANT RICHARDS LTD.
ST MARTIN'S STREET

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This work will be issued in quarterly parts. Part Two, containing Cantos I and II, will be published shortly.

TO
MARTIN SECKER

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INTRODUCTORY

I

WHAT purpose has the singer in a land
When he must dwell with men who cannot hear,
And would not if they could, but in their bland
Self-righteousness assume that their own fear
Is Heaven's law, and will not understand
That life is more than Bibles, bounce and beer?
The singer has no purpose, yet he goes
Making sweet music among music's foes.

April in England! April in the woods!
Earth has no beauty half so rare as this.
O the enchantment! Here the spirit broods.
Here, half aswoon, young lovers find their kiss
Melt into pain, and, dreading their own moods,
They think the world and they are made amiss.
O! English lads and maids in their own spite
Turn with their love the spring to winter's night.

Call then the blackbird, call the willow-wren,
Call the bright robin, chiff-chaff, bullfinch, tit,
All singing birds to waken senseless men,
Dullards of England, dense and slow of wit.
Beasts and the trees have heard the call again,
But men are still impervious to it.
Look in their eyes. There is no wonder found.
Were they not better laid beneath the ground?

Toll the church bell and dig a goodly grave,
 Bid the wren sing his noble little dirge.
 Robin shall have a feast of worms, the brave
 Red bird has earned it, through the winter's scourge
 Staying with men. Might his example save
 The English lover in his Sunday serge
 Who drags his frosted love through April weather,
 He and his mumchance maid congealed together.

Love is laid in the grave and April passes,
 When all else blooms, intolerably rich,
 Flowers in gardens, in hedgerows masses
 Of blossom, scented, every twig and switch
 Nodding over flowers, over shining grasses,
 All is aglow in field and wood and ditch ;
 Only English love in such a wealth of living
 Lives not at all and life is unforgiving.

Cuckoo still calls to mock the English lover,
 And sounds a warning note. Such wooing leads
 To a tragic dullness, thistles in clover
 For English husband. Heart of woman bleeds
 In her baffled fury when the best is over
 And she knows him blind to all her savage needs.
 Cuckoo, call on ! Nor you nor me they'll hear ;
 They choose to die and perish of their fear.

In England love is dead. No spirit stirs
 In English hearts when all the earth's aflame
 With beauty, for their cowardice prefers
 To run from change and have each day the same,
 All seasons like ; no matter what occurs,
 To be esteemed, as though life were a game
 That men and women play to win applause,
 Itself enough with neither aim nor cause.

A household crippled by excessive rent,
 A husband who comes home to snarl or snore,
 A wife who starves herself that he his bent
 For eating, drinking, betting, may explore,
 And children may have boots, and money lent
 May be repaid with interest, and more,
 To pay for goods bought on the hire system,
 Another dodge to grind the poor and twist 'em.

Or, if the couple are beyond the reach
 Of tricks to squeeze the humble, poor and needy,
 When their immunity and luck should teach
 Them sense, they lose their virtue and are greedy,
 And full of envy when they see the breach
 Between Mayfair and Putney. They feel seedy
 When their neighbours own a more expensive car.
 They are ashamed of being what they are.

They built their towns because they could not bear
 To dwell dishonoured by their empty hearts
 Amid earth's shining beauty, and the air,
 The free, keen air, they could not breathe. Black arts
 They brewed to poison the sweet air and there
 In places fouled they set their noisy marts,
 Where pimps and whores and frauds in daily meeting
 Could taste their sole surviving joy in cheating.

That joy remains, since something must remain
 Of human nature, else the race would dwindle.
 There must be zest to stop the horrid drain
 Of life through their negation and to kindle
 A spark from the desire they have slain.
 They will not live to love but live to swindle.
 For generations they have sought no better
 Than to ignore the spirit for the letter.

The letter says that Britons never shall
 Be slaves, and therefore Britons are—(no matter
 What they seem)—free men. *Honi soit qui mal
 Y pense.* Their freedom's mixed with no such chatter
 As was set going by the French cabal
 Who brought in Liberty with such a clatter.
 The English buy their freedom with much gold
 Or, lacking it, are slaves till they are old.

They have forgotten the Apostle Paul ;
 With his one saying worth remembering :
 "I was born free." If they are free at all,
 It is by being rich enough to fling
 Discretion to the winds that they may fall
 Into the pit of their lust's fashioning.
 O ! they are free to make the swift descent
 Into the sloth that stifles discontent.

They will be honoured by their eight-hour slaves,
 Honoured and envied and extolled by Smiles.
 It is for this that Britain rules the waves,
 That rogues may freely profit by their wiles,
 That churches may be built by holy knaves,
 That sordid streets may run for miles and miles,
 With no relief save the repulsive pubs
 That poor men must frequent in lieu of clubs.

And Britain rules the waves that once a week
 The working man may pawn his Sunday suit,
 That men at Westminster may rise and speak
 Not what they think but what they think their mute
 Constituents will swallow ; that the meek
 May toil to see the rich destroy the fruit
 Of all their labours ; that the Sunday papers
 May advertise and puff the money-scrappers.

And Britain rules the waves that millionaires
 May sell more soap and cocoa, margarine,
 And tea and pills, lung tonic, tables, chairs,
 Boots, urinals and motors, gelatine,
 Old bones and soda ; that skilful Bulls and Bears
 May rig a market ; that obscure, nuseen,
 But well-within-the-law manipulators
 May fleece the public to tip German waiters.

Great Britain rules the waves that novelists
 May advertise themselves by praising tonic ;
 That thousands throng to honour pugilists
 While concert rooms are empty ; that Slavonic
 Jews and Germans may fill the Honours Lists
 For subsidising Shakespeare ; that the chronic
 State of art should be slow strangulation
 Lest it should break the slumbers of the nation.

For truly England is the isle of sleep.
 What you shall see there is not life but dreams,
 Such dreams as children have, with nothing deep
 To puzzle waking hours. Naught is, but seems
 To be and then is not. There is no leap
 To consciousness. The mad race sleeps and teems
 With fantasy, cracked thoughts and twisted passions,
 And knows no law save self-help and the fashions.

Now come with me and, while the warring youth
 Of every land in labyrinthine ditches
 Face sudden death, we'll try to face the truth,
 Heroic task, and yet to save nine stitches
 We'll sew our one in time and know no ruth.
 If need be, we will sit right through our breeches
 Until we've told our modern island story,
 And disengaged its humbug from its glory.

But first of all, to silence jeer and flout,
 We'll have it clear that we are patriotic,
 True-blue, fair-haired, and British without a doubt,
 Hating the sight of anything despotic,
 And loving freedom so that we look out
 For any menace to it as exotic
 Here in England. That said, without excitement
 We can proceed to draw up our indictment.

There was a time, last year (so long ago
 It almost never was), when all was well,
 Or so they told us, those who ought to know.
 England was sound, as sound as any bell,
 The nation sound and free from top to toe,
 Except for Ulster when, old men still tell,
 There was a kind of small pasteboard revolt
 In which an Irish lawyer shot his bolt.

He shot it, as you'll see, to some effect.
 But let us first in raptured contemplation
 Gaze on those times so happy, circumspect
 And truly democratic, when the nation
 Was governed for its good by the elect
 Of franchised males, to the exasperation
 Of some unreasoned females. Let us think
 And wonder, for it baffles pen and ink.

There should be monuments of precious stone
 To honour those great days, and temples, spires,
 Domes, pavilions, gardens sweetly grown
 With stately scented flowers. There should be choirs
 In palaces and gardens to intone
 And chant the praise of famous men, esquires
 Knighted, knights ennobled, as good Liberals
 Or Tories honoured by their King and pals.

Those times should never die. They never will.
 Historic names were made in those brave days,
 Names that in England shall be spoken still
 When men of smaller times have shed their bays
 Or laurels or oak leaves or what you will,
 And we've forgotten even Shakespeare's plays.
 Such names as Lyons hide so rare a mystery
 As to o'ershadow even English history.

O Muse! Thou once didst hear the prayer of Milton
 Invoking thee to hymn the fall of man
 From Paradise. We had regained and built on
 Paradise a Heaven from which to scan
 The corners of the earth, and like a Wilton
 Carpet (red) we unrolled the English plan
 For English feet to tread on. English credit
 Ne'er touched a place unless it cupped or bled it.

O Muse! With what premeditated art
 Must I unfold the beauties of that Heaven
 Watered by Thames! With what a fainting heart
 I mix my dough and wait upon thy leaven!
 Waiting on thee I needs must stand apart
 And seem like Judas barred by the eleven.
 Without thine aid I shall but write cold reason,
 Which is confounded with its rhyme-mate treason.

How to begin? The Press? The House? The Stage?
 The fabled glories of old Leicester Square
 Flanked by ancestral halls? No, let this page
 Contain of all my beauties the most fair.
 Let it be given to the modern mage,
 The seer, the prophet, the beyond-compare,
 Most downright, upright writer of those days—
 To Bottomley my Muse shall give her praise.

This is John Bull (quite frank about his debts),
 A fallen angel, yet the most observed
 Of all observers. Him I choose. He gets
 The public ear and stands forth unreserved
 And blunt and all the host of Heaven sets
 At naught, with scandalmongers quite unnerved.
 No other angel is so representative.
 Who never fell are dull and argumentative.

Horatio! Sweet argument is not
 His métier. He ever scorned to think.
 And intellect and art to him are rot.
 An awkward fact he never fails to blink
 When truth and justice seem to hatch a plot
 To bring about his downfall and to sink
 The Empire which he always has his eye on,
 Convinced indeed that he's the British lion.

Therefore as Dante with the Tuscan bard
 So I with B., than whom in present Hell
 There is no fiercer patriot, regard
 And capture for posterity the swell,
 The ebb, the flow—to run the figure hard,
 The undertow of this great miracle.
 If need be we will publish as a serial
 Our notes of England Liberal-Imperial.

II

I CALL that virtue which a man believes
 So wholly that his every act must tend
 Towards it, even though his conscience cleaves
 To nobler aim or some more pleasant end.
 It is a virtue even among thieves
 To stand by co-believers and to bend
 Never to compromise ; to steal (in reason)
 And leave no scrap for infidels to seize on.

It is the faith of Privilege (the Peers,
 Dukes, Earls and suchlike) that no earthly power,
 No, not the wealth of Rothschild or de Beers,
 Can bring about a cataclysmal hour
 To show that all is not what it appears.
 Impassive Privilege upon its tower
 Surveys the scene below and takes its toll,
 As being part, yet greater than the whole.

The middle classes, living by respect,
 Believe in morals as a means of sharing,
 Some day, the privilege of the elect,
 Which somehow they confuse with overbearing.
 They see no courage in the ruling sect
 And throw away the fruit and keep the paring.
 Incapable of knowing their superiors,
 They raise themselves by crushing their inferiors.

We'll say this for the Peerage that they care
 Not one small damn how anyone may feel
 The uses of the Privilege they wear
 So easily. The poor may sweat and squeal
 And suffer. Let them. It is only fair
 That they should work and slave for every meal.
 Someone must work, and if the poor are made for it
 There is no reason why they should be paid for it.

They must have money, but with that they pay
 In rent and price of food and drink and clo'es
 And boots and furniture enough to lay
 A firm foundation for the divers shows
 That make the nation's swagger and display.
 They pay, but where on earth the money goes,
 God knows. The Church won't say, but gives its blessing
 And leaves the conscience-stricken poet guessing.

The system is that he who works shall be
 So poorly paid that he can not afford
 Either to save or with economy
 To buy. But rights, won with the sword
 Or intrigue long ago, his penury
 Still bleed to add to idle people's hoard.
 These rights so press on those poor men who work
 That all who can save up and try to shirk.

At first the game was to possess the land ;
 But land without the value labour lends
 Is worthless. Therefore out the greedy hand
 Was stretched and for mere mercenary ends,
 By subtle cunning which none could withstand,
 There was evolved the dodge of dividends.
 Each pound could buy an interest in labour.
 Each monied man could sweat his poorer neighbour.

This I half knew but never saw its wonder
 Until I set out on my pilgrimage.
 My innocence called all such profits plunder
 And was prepared to drop its heritage.
 Upon my ears there broke like peals of thunder
 A voice that cried the glories of the age.
 It was Horatio intent on reaching
 The highest and the lowest with his preaching.

I met Horatio at Sandown Park.
 He had a horse and very kindly told me
 It had no chance of winning (very dark
 The mysteries of racing). Then to scold me
 He began, for lack of faith. A modern ark
 Was England and it could never hold me
 Unless I paired with him and backed his plan
 For government to suit the business man.

We got on very well, and had champagne
 For lunch and dinner at Romano's, where
 He did some business. Then next day again
 We went off racing, ill-assorted pair.
 I listened while he made his projects plain
 And built most lovely castles in the air.
 He was so charming that if I'd had any
 I should have trusted him with my last penny.

For some strange reason he appeared convinced
 That I possessed a bubble reputation.
 He flattered me so grossly that I winced
 And pointed out my weakness in narration.
 He had been told that I had never minced
 Unpleasant truth or used polite evasion.
 That I had not made money out of truth
 He generously put down to my youth.

So we hobnobbed, and ate, and drank, and smoked,
 And went about his business in the City.
 He had three actions in the Courts, provoked
 By scoundrelly attorneys, a committee
 Of creditors and enemies, men soaked
 In prejudice and intrigue. He'd no pity,
 And in the witness-box gave them no quarter.
 They were like drunkards with no drink but water.

He had affairs obscure and complicated,
 A finger in the most surprising pies,
 Large bills and larger cheques (with some post-dated),
 And files of letters praising to the skies
 His active brain, the programme he had stated,
 His growing stock of trenchant battle-cries.
 The ways of party made him very mournful,
 But when I spoke of office he was scornful.

I asked him why, and he looked enigmatic ;
 His lips were twisted and oracular.
 Then, rising with a gesture, blunt, emphatic,
 "Is England to be faithful to her star?"
 He asked. "Is England democratic?
 Then let her know where her best statesmen are!
 What does she want to make and keep her free
 But men of doubtless popularity?"

"All else but this she has. The world in fee,
 A Navy sanspareil, and institutions
 Evolved through ages of sweet liberty,
 And long immunity from revolutions;
 Enormous exports, and beyond the sea
 An Empire; a tradition of ablutions,
 Games, sport, good form, and that most rare commodity,
 Humour distilled down to the point of oddity.

"The Continent? What is it but a hash
 That England settles every now and then?
 Napoleon's genius came to smash
 On England. Why? Because her simple men
 Are lions, kings, free bull-dogs when such trash
 As Frenchmen, Turks, or Russians break their den."
 These words were uttered years and years ago
 Before the Huns were Europe's common foe.

I have forgotten what besides he said,
 A vague remembrance that the English could
 Somehow ignore all portions but the red
 In the Projection of Mercator. Good
 Dwelt in those portions. Englishmen had bled
 In victory upon them, and there stood
 Their flag for trade to follow, after profit.
 All other kinds of people were warned off it.

But will, I thought, the others be content
 To be ignored, and can they well ignore
 The little island off the Continent?
 What if they too are minded to explore
 The habitable earth and raise their fent
 Or bunting to the breeze on some fair shore
 Unoccupied, or occupied by niggers
 Whose heads are innocent of thought or figures?

What if the rest be envious to paint
 The map in other shades, as purple, yellow,
 Or green, or blue, or rainbow? Is "You mayn't!"
 To be the English fiat in a bellow
 Leonine? And should there be complaint,
 What happens then? Does English might so mellow
 Its effects that no one's made to suffer,
 And he who thinks he's hurt is just a duffer?

Unprofitable questions ! What is, is.
 Our England's Heaven. Hardly need the sun
 Shine any more. Our light outdazzles his.
 Heaven on earth ! The age of gold's begun.
 And there's an end of all old mysteries.
 The English legend's writ that he may run
 Who reads. He has it all in daily doses.
 The Press gives bulletins and diagnoses.

Of thought ? Of morals ? No, sir, of the marts,
 Of stocks, investments, shipping, grain and coal,
 Of iron, steel, and gold, and cloth, machines and parts,
 Of stone and slate, fish, leather, fur, the whole
 Damn thing. The papers are the charts
 Of modern life. In them you reach the soul
 Of Heaven here on earth. All else is chatter
 About such things as art that make no matter.

These sheets are padded out with tales of crimes,
 Divorce and lawsuits, speeches, plays, and dress,
 And literary pages, and the *Times*
 Has supplements, but these, if one may guess,
 Are paid for by advertisements, those limes
 That play upon the chosen. But the stress
 Is laid on everything but the essential.
 The unimportant makes men deferential.

For all they know and all they need to know
 Is just the state of money. This beside
 All else is unconsidered and may go
 To Hell for all we care. This has been tried
 And found a sure narcotic for our woe,
 The key to Arcady, whence we deride
 The soft imagined goods of bygone ages
 As gins and snares and pretty gilded cages.

Money's the thing ! 'Tis money makes us free !
 Free ! Free to mock at love and God and passion,
 At honour, joy, ideas, liberty
 Of thought, vice, virtue, feeling. We can lash on
 Journalists to mock at all mortality.
 Eternal money ! All else is but fashion.
 Our mocking homage, bought and sold and bartered,
 Is worship of the freedom thou hast chartered.

Therefore have money ! Beg it, filch it, steal it,
 Hoard, borrow, lend at usance, save, invest,
 Bargain and cheat. Be sure you'll never feel it.
 If you are rich enough then you are blest.
 If you're a fool, your money will conceal it.
 For social life there needs no other test.
 Manners and wit, good sense and tact have vanished,
 Mocked quite away, and honesty is banished.

Another Eden ! This high merit add
 That there's no chance of God Almighty calling,
 No Tree of Knowledge, and no angel bad
 Or good to lead us to another falling,
 No serpent to creep in and drive us mad.
 We are immune from tragedy appalling.
 There's nothing we can feel save money only.
 It's God who's fallen, left out, cold and lonely.

This we've accomplished ! We, the English, rovers,
 Adventurers, assisted by the Jews,
 Thinking of naught but profits and turnovers,
 We've made the world our fee to pay us dues.
 Nothing's undone. What any man discovers
 Must profit us, for, heads or tails, he'll lose.
 The world's great accoucheur and monthly nurse,
 All men bow down before our mighty purse.

And yet we keep the forms of ancient days,
 A God, a church, the law, a moral code,
 All kinds of pimps of flattery and praise,
 As artists, writers, tailors *à la mode*,
 And brilliant figures for the public gaze,
 Well paid to bear, like pack-horses, the load
 Of our collective vanity. They stagger
 'Neath the burden of Empire's bluff and swagger.

We have a King, and officers of sorts,
 And pay them well to keep up the pretence
 That we detest Noll Cromwell with his warts,
 And Wilkes and Fox and Cobden, and a fence
 We ring round pint-pots trying to hold quarts,
 Fee'd men who'll babble anything but sense.
 We take our monied freedom as of course.
 We always drive the cart before the horse.

O lovely life, when everything's a joke!
 Religion, honour, probity and truth.
 Imagination, if it ever woke
 In us would die as die our grace and youth.
 Beauty and love by money are bespoken
 And cut to measure, cut down without ruth.
 That's just the joke we always find amusing
 To think of what we gain by what we're losing.

We lose emotion, liberty and frankness,
 But where's the good that they have ever done us?
 Emotion is a weed whose stifling rankness
 Has choked the growth that solid thinking won us.
 And liberty's a spark that in the dankness
 Of English air's no use to those who run us.
 So we will back the caucus ministerial
 Whose humour is the Liberal-Imperial,

III

Now in detail let's think of England's bliss,
Of what we've done since lucky Waterloo,
Rid Europe of a tyrant and the hiss
Of warring snakes was silenced, and the new
Invention, money, carried us to this,
Our Heaven where we've nothing more to do.
It is, I promise you, worth admiration,
Our great improvement on the first creation.

First we have built Leviathan, a city
Nine miles by nine, a Babel with no tower,
Also with no design, where without pity
Are huddled millions to help raise our power ;
Where men of brains and women who are pretty
Are given fame and homage for an hour ;
Where common men and women mate and breed
And slake with rent the noble landlord's greed.

True, there's romance ; the river, and St Paul's,
Hyde Park, the Tower, Kensington, St James',
The Quadrant, Piccadilly, City Halls,
Museums, houses tableted with names
Illustrious. Romance ! Romance still calls,
And still is heard, though modern living shames
Its loveliness and covers up with grime
The legend and the honour of old time.

There's new romance. It lives in dirty streets,
 In railways, workshops, factories and dens
 Where women feed machines, whose thudding beats
 Upon the brain and fashions citizens
 White-faced and dazed. Their days are filled with feats
 Of hourly endurance in their pens.
 (I quite forgot the romance of the Zoo.
 There you shall find rare beasts imprisoned too.)

'Tis part of Heaven, therefore must be right,
 A glance at it is all we need to give.
 The poor are on the whole quite gay and bright,
 And, strangely, seem to like the way they live.
 They can indulge their pleasures in the night—
 They've only two and those are fugitive.
 They're kind but reckless. They have their deserts.
 A woman's paid three bob a dozen shirts.

They'd be quite charming if they did not smell
 And weren't so stupid, or so slow and lazy.
 Their part of Heaven is the most like Hell
 And drives good men like Galsworthy half crazy.
 They live like others for the dinner-bell
 And every other thought is dim and hazy.
 Yet they stand by the English church and state
 And keep for foreigners a sullen hate.

They are the background wellnigh Rembrandtesque
 From which we paint up to a high light on
 The nose of Rothschild, working at his desk,
 Snuffing up sums, the prolegomenon
 To sleight of hand, the golden arabesque
 That sweeps high Heaven to the rubicon.
 This is the point essential, syllogistic,
 At which the cult of money's almost mystic.

And yet, though we've defied the simple laws
 Of nature, and made new light, and half expelled
 The spirit out of matter, and can cause
 The end of pestilence come down from eld ;
 And eat up distance, stop the very jaws
 Of death, in one great law divine we're held.
 That's change, and lo ! great Rothschild's nasal organ
 Has been put out of joint by Pierpont Morgan.

But *plus ça change, plus c'est la même*. We'll shift
 The high light and the picture loses none
 Of its strange eerie beauty and its drift
 Is still the same, that never 'neath the sun
 Was such a case of perfect wholesale lift,
 So many men beneath the sway of one.
 The tale of Midas in reverse appears :
 He touches gold, the rest wear asses' ears.

We're proud of them. We wag them and the longest
 Win honours, women, pleasure, high success.
 The race is no more to the swiftest or the strongest
 But often to the vainest. Silliness
 Is more than cunning. Right bows to the wrongest.
 For flattery we'll give all we possess.
 In Heaven we have grown so queer and nervy
 That life is inside-out and topsy-turvy.

We'd not believe it Heaven otherwise.
 And therefore we have Pharisees and Scribes,
 Musicians, artists, writers to tell lies
 And make us feel we're paid when we take bribes.
 They help us to make light of human ties
 As weakness in the chosen of the tribes.
 Experience and passion so perplex us
 That we reduce them to the money nexus.

Our feelings therefore live beneath our skins
 And give us none, or very little, trouble.
 We weep at mothers, babies, certain sins,
 And so our pleasure in them we redouble.
 We laugh when any solemn fool begins
 To take *au sérieux* the human bubble.
 Things harsh and grim drive us to giddy laughter,
 For we are daft and growing quickly dafter.

Yet we have found no way of getting rid
 Of politics. We'd do so in a minute
 But for ambitious men who make a bid
 For place and power, and when they are in it
 Forget their place and quickly put the lid
 On power for fear that other men should win it.
 We suffer them and find their tricks amusing.
 They keep their trade and life from ever fusing.

There was a time before the dawn of Heaven
 When parties stood for clean opposing notions.
 The Tories were for bossing all the seven
 Seas, five continents, trade routes and oceans.
 The Liberals said, England is a leaven
 And must be soft and subtle in her motions.
 How can she teach the others to be free
 If half her sons are sunk in poverty ?

Neither was right and neither understood
 The other, and yet each could discipline
 The other's thought to see in trees a wood.
 When one was out the other must be in ;
 And so between them both they worked for good.
 Whatever happened, England stood to win.
 The parties kept themselves so well in order
 That neither often crossed real mischief's border.

Yet with success in trade and wide expansion
 The Tories got the credit, through old Dizzy,
 Of having built so Heavenly a mansion
 As justified them in their actions busy.
 The luckless Liberals had put their fancy on
 Too dark a horse that was not worth a tizzy.
 They had no cry would win a by-election
 And lived unplaced in gloom and dark dejection.

They could not make out how the Tories did it.
 What won them votes? Not brains, not eloquence.
 Where had the Tories got this mighty credit?
 They'd no reforms. They'd saved nor pounds nor pence.
 What was their bid? Let Liberals outbid it.
 At least they'd raise their cry with common-sense.
 They found the great Imperial idea
 Had bred apace since Palmerston's Crimea.

And yet the Tories hardly seemed to know
 How good a thing they'd stumbled on by chance.
 They still regarded catching votes as low—
 The kind of thing you'd look to find in France.
 The Empire was an axiom and so
 Stood well above the claptrap of romance.
 They much preferred to pour down ridicule
 On Liberal reforms, and dish Home Rule.

One man the Tories had, ex-Liberal,
 Who thought the Empire stood in need of booming;
 They held it vulgar in their bran-new pal
 And would not see the cloud that he saw looming.
 They thought him odd, almost theatrical,
 In the strange attitudes he was assuming.
 He'd heard, which they had not, of Cecil Rhodes,
 Knew what his name foreboded and forebodes.

He knew that there's no credit in reform,
 That Home Rule was not worth its disrepute,
 That if he wished to take the game by storm
 He'd better find and hold the strongest suit.
 If he could only blow the Tories warm
 And teach their young idea how to shoot
 Then in the Transvaal with its Golden Rand
 He had a shout would surely beat the band.

The Tories being nice and still fastidious
 Disliked the early products of the Cape.
 That type of Jew they thought debased and hideous
 And much too like the prehistoric ape.
 And Africa, not being too invidious,
 They saw outlined in that distasteful shape.
 Not being certain who would pay the racket
 They heard their new friend's scheme but would not back it.

They hesitated, hesitating, lost.
 They fumbled, floundered, dared not touch the thing
 Or test it on the hustings. Like a frost
 Their timid speeches nipped the blossoming,
 Its petals on the vacant wind were tossed,
 A touch of winter in the dawn of spring.
 The Liberals had office for a month or two
 And jumped the Tories' claim and kept it too.

They said, we are Imperial, we are,
 We democrats with excellent ideas
 Accept the Empire, as the moth the star,
 It guides, it leads, our plans and panaceas.
 At running Empire we'll outpoint the Czar
 And flout the Kaiser with his grenadiers.
 The country shall of Empire have its fill
 And swallow, in the end, the Home Rule Bill.

Now Liberals and Tories are alike
 In this. They think that what they think entails
 The public good. How what they think may strike
 The common man they never think. It fails?
 They'll fight and fall in the last ditch or dyke
 (A job of sorts) before their spirit quails.
 They never know the joy of human thinking
 And fallacies they swallow without blinking.

Both swallowed down the new back-veldt religion
 And were two minds but with a single thought:
 How first to catch and then to roast their pigeon,
 The British public, which can not be bought.
 Each had their bank to build their noble bridge on,
 But would the public stump up as it ought?
 For building airy bridges is expensive
 And the demands of Empire were extensive.

The Empire-builder in his house, Groot Schuur,
 Was quite indifferent to party squabbles.
 Let them make haste. The thing was ripe and sure,
 If they'd stop shrieking when the state-ship wobbles.
 It was no case of either kill or cure,
 But of a meal, a bite and two-three gobbles.
 There came a time when he'd no longer wait,
 The fish had swallowed down his hook and bait.

The Tories by good luck were then in power;
 They ran the country or they let it run.
 'Twas fate, they said. The man had met the hour.
 (For men talk thus when villainies are done.)
 They called the working classes manhood's flower,
 As rich men always do when war's begun.
 The fish was hooked, but took a deal of landing,
 No Tory reputations were left standing.

The two republics, brought beneath the flag,
 Vowed fealty, and England paid the bill.
 The Tories had no voices left to brag,
 The Liberals replaced them with much skill.
 The Tories broke the house, but all the swag
 The Liberals locked safely in their till.
 God save King Edward, guardian of peace,
 Now taken on at ninety-nine years' lease.

The nine and ninety years from nineteen-six
 Was calculated. Now then to retrench,
 Reform, reconstitute, in short to fix
 The destinies of Empire. First the French
 Shall be our friends and they shall freely mix
 With us and help the friendly bond to clench.
 With gazing on our brilliance till they're blinded
 They too will be Imperially minded.

There's Africa to be cut up in slices
 And Persia open to some influence
 (And why not ours?). Ambassadors' advices
 Imply that Turkey's weak in her defence.
 There's Russia's claim. But find out what her price is,
 We do not claim (of course) omnipotence.
 With Liberals in power there's no question
 That Liberty's our aim past all suggestion.

There lies our scheme, not made in Birmingham.
 Our own. The Empire, Liberal *in esse*,
 Has flung o'er half the world its oriflamme,
 The power born at Agincourt and Cressy
 Makes half the world when swearing mutter Damn,
 And Englishmen are aped where men are dressy,
 A twenty-year-old Cockney comic song
 Is sung in pidgin-English in Hong-Kong.

The thing was done by lawyers not by squires.
 That makes it legal. Lawyers know the law.
 On every summit light the beacon fires
 To tell the world to hold us in due awe.
 We've done this thing, by skill in pulling wires,
 We've got the chestnut with the Tory paw.
 Ring out the old and ring the new world in,
 We've got the gold and got it without sin.

Our conscience is as clear as running water,
 The Nonconformist cannot raise his voice,
 The wicked Tories willed the ghastly slaughter,
 But we, good Liberals, in peace rejoice.
 The Tories are like Jephthah and his daughter.
 Their party is their victim. They've no choice.
 Now we can take it easy. We are free
 Except (perhaps) in Foreign Policy.

That's not so easy—Empire's very well,
 But if we take the good old Tory line
 Of being God's own high and mighty swell
 (It seems we must or Dukes won't bid us dine),
 Then we must learn to say, O, go to Hell,
 In diplomatic language, to the swine
 Who talk about Bagdad or Ispahan
 Or German railways run through Turkestan.

The best way is, we think, to trim our sail
 And let the Foreign Office do its best.
 It knows these languages and draws a veil,
 And lifts it now and then at our request.
 We have prevailed and always shall prevail.
 What we can't have is sweeter unpossessed.
 We cannot have retrenchment, peace, reform,
 If we're aware of an impending storm.

We're pledged to Home Rule, pensions, rare
Refreshing fruit and God knows what beside.
And we, unlike a woman's tender care,
Can not forgetful be of what we've cried.
We've promised that all Englishmen shall share
Tot homines in our nobilicide.
All foreign policies are immaterial—
We must and shall be Liberal-Imperial.

IV

It works! By Jove, it works, this subtle plan.
We undertake to give self-government,
As it is practised in the Isle of Man,
To all our colonies, to circumvent
Sedition in the Empire's caravan.
And every million we account well spent
That fortifies Imperial defences
And aggravates Imperial expenses.

We have to feed the Clyde shipbuilding yards,
The Tyne and Barrow, Birmingham, and Wales.
For if we don't, it's plainly on the cards
The voters there will up and twist our tails.
Wales is a land of druids, harpists, bards,
But mining is the thing that turns the scales.
Ideal Empire is our stated goal,
But, after all, its life depends on coal.

And if our wealth on mining coal depends,
There's nothing burns it half so fast as ships.
The more coal burned, the higher dividends.
We'll always have new Dreadnoughts on the slips.
They must have guns, of course for peaceful ends,
To guard the King, say, on his Channel trips.
We have police to quell revolt or riot.
We only want to burn our coal in quiet.

We threaten no one. No one threatens us.
 Why should they threaten? Who is there to grumble?
 We've had our way with hardly any fuss.
 The ancient order has begun to crumble,
 We've broken up the Tory blunderbuss,
 The House of Lords. Their House of Cards will tumble.
 In ships and guns more powerful than they,
 We've made it clear that they have had their day.

More ships, more money in the party coffers,
 That means reform, retrenchment, noble schemes
 To help the poor, that is, if cranks and scoffers
 Will only let us realise our dreams.
 We'll jump at every single chance that offers.
 With plans and cures our party fairly teems.
 Home Rule is not our only platform plank.
 We've thought for all, of every class and rank.

Two-headed Janus, someone called our leader.
 A thousand heads could not contain his thought.
 Each of his thoughts is a prolific breeder,
 And all are trained to do just what they ought.
 Each minister's a wet-nurse and a feeder,
 For love of it, and all of them are taught
 To think alike, and all of them agree
 That England's coal is best burned on the sea.

You call that unproductive? It's insuring
 The life-blood of the Empire, guarantees
 That England's wealth shall grow and be enduring
 As long as there is traffic on the seas.
 It makes her trebly sure of still procuring
 The food she cannot raise; and, if you please,
 No Englishman could sleep sound in his bed
 Unless he knew that next week he'll be fed.

The Germans have an Empire, but a vile,
 A thing of blood and iron, with a place
 Called Krupp's at Essen, which with wicked guile
 Eats German coal, and half the populace
 Is ground and drilled in military file
 To sell great guns to half the human race.
 A conscript army gives Krupp's its excuse.
 Now God be thanked, we're free from that abuse.

We break the vicious circle they are in
 By being Liberal, with due respect
 For ancient institutions and the thin
 Pretence that we have still a ruling sect.
 When abject poverty's your only sin
 Your ruling class is large but still select.
 This we've accomplished since we dished the Tories;
 Now few are barred from London's social glories.

We're free from prejudice against the Jews,
 Once they have left the East End and have risen
 By Hackney, Bayswater and its purlieus,
 With their large wives whom diamonds bedizen,
 And very few to dine with them refuse.
 They are a kind of top-mast or a mizen.
 A Cassel, Samuel, or Edgar Speyer
 Can keep our climbers climbing ever higher.

And all are climbers. No one's at the top,
 Since no one's ever reached it. All climb on.
 So thick they throng, that nobody can stop
 Or heed the fate of his companion.
 And others come when weaklings faint and drop,
 No time to pause and look where they are gone.
 The entry to this new august Society
 Is won by money or by notoriety.

It is as though the Revolution rabble
 In old Versailles had decked them out to play
 At noble lords and wits, and with their babble
 Half-hypnotised had driven sense away.
 In thought, art, music, poetry they dabble,
 And wear new clothes and jewels for the play.
 With so much playing in the audience
 The players' art becomes a thin pretence.

The Democratic Empire of '06
 Was born, as we have shown, in blood and death.
 The old, green England passed across the Styx,
 When greatest Britain drew its infant breath.
 Emancipated females armed with bricks,
 Strange, mannish as Good Queen Elizabeth,
 Declared that they would drown the precious brat
 Unless 'twas nursed by Woman, Democrat.

The working man, remembering the war,
 And "manhood's flower" left to starve and rot,
 Observing how old England crossed the bar,
 With one clear call, staked out a goodly plot,
 And said, We won't remain just as we are ;
 We want a damn sight more than we have got.
 You've got your Trusts, we'll have our Unions
 And make you shift your bloody sit-upons.

Except these two, and no one thought them serious,
 There were no clouds upon the clear blue sky.
 The women seemed just mad and half delirious,
 Exasperated Wadmans, green in eye.
 The working men were far more deleterious,
 For they had votes to reckon by and by.
 And yet what mattered these uneasy lives
 In this the age of grand superlatives ?

The age of speed ! The age of records broken !
 The richest age the world has ever seen !
 The age of grand hotels, and, more betoken,
 The age when man first flew in a machine !
 The age that takes its thought from Thorpe-le-Soken
 And dreams wherever H. G. Wells has been.
 It grew up in a night. A change so thorough
 Has not been seen since old Cloudeckooborough.

Among things lost were ease and quiet leisure,
 Things worthless in themselves yet very sweet.
 Now no one sipped but all gulped down their pleasure,
 And pleasure grew in every noisy street.
 The very poorest had their humble measure.
 Provision was both lavish and complete,
 In palaces most gaudy, but unsightly,
 Where sobs and laughter were regaled twice-nightly.

Soon picture houses were as thick as pubs
 To give a stupor without being drunk,
 In watching, say, an ant-heap with its grubs,
 Or warships chase a Chinese slaving-junk.
 All sorts and kinds of moving Tales of Tubs
 In surfeit till the thinking mind is sunk,
 Impressions on the brain so swiftly saddled
 That very soon the poor wee thing is addled.

And much the same takes place in higher quarters,
 Though life itself is there the picture-show,
 Benumbing all the hopeful sons and daughters
 Of those who know those who are in the know.
 That kind of knowledge other knowledge slaughters
 And brings the educated level low.
 What does it matter in the throng and press?
 It has no other standard than success.

Successful lawyers govern politics.
 Successful authors rule the moral roast.
 Successful grocers serve the Peers to mix.
 Successful sportsmen are our special boast.
 Success has been our god since nineteen-six.
 Successful men are priests. Of them the most
 Successful are a race almost Levitical,
 Endued with rights transcending the political.

What they can do would make the devil jealous.
 He never had so clear a course at men.
 But what they do, that nobody can tell us,
 Nor how, nor why, and neither where nor when.
 We know that they can lightly buy and sell us,
 And when they've sold us, buy us back again.
 The evidence is only circumstantial,
 Their mystic power is the High Financial.

Somehow an airy fabric has been built
 In which the British Empire's but a cell.
 It is supposed that men like Vanderbilt
 Can find their way about it fairly well.
 But in a bee-hive when the honey's spilt
 Why it was so the queen-bee could not tell,
 Or how the hive was built. Our fabric's grown
 Of spiders' webs that round our souls are thrown.

That's but a guess, but this I surely know,
 That it is cold and cramped and bleak and bare.
 I watch in gardens how the lilies grow,
 And how free birds and insects take the air,
 And how they sing and hum and blithely go,
 Just as they please, here, there and everywhere.
 But we live in the palace of our doom
 And grudge each other even elbow-room.

In love we are like schoolboys grinning, nudging
 At some broad passage in a poet.
 Our charity's another kind of grudging—
 We hate the poor but are too soft to show it.
 We'd gladly leave the luckless wretches drudging
 But are afraid lest other folk should know it.
 At heart we know ourselves to be confined
 But never dream our prison is our mind.

That cannot be. The mind of man's a wonder
 And must be clear of his deceitful heart.
 His mind has kept his life and Life asunder,
 His destiny and nature quite apart.
 It might be true that man must live by plunder
 But for his hymn to truth and beauty, Art.
 There lies the token of his true proclivity,
 The song he's sung through all his harsh captivity.

The grim old fabric of his grudging mind
 Has grown so huge, that doors are now unlocked
 And walls torn down, and dungeons undermined.
 Where neither air nor light was, holes are knocked.
 And hapless creatures where they peaked and pined
 Now find that they can move and no one's shocked.
 They rush together in a wild confusion.
 They herd and huddle and resent intrusion.

They find themselves in galleried saloons
 Among a litter of old stones and rubble.
 The air is filled with gay and vulgar tunes
 And they are charmed and half forget their trouble
 In laughing at the antics of buffoons.
 Soon wages rise. At once the prices double.
 They're told that they're an Empire and a nation
 And shall enjoy the boon of education.

They learn to read and pat ! a flood of papers
 Comes tearing down, a glucous inky spate
 Of jokes, excitements, fun and comic capers,
 A halfpenny a dip, the cheapest rate.
 Another stream, exuding heady vapours,
 Gives them the news and keeps them up-to-date ;
 And lest the task of reading it should bore them,
 The headlines, stars and snippets do it for them.

Unfathomable public ! When it's tapped
 For halfpennies and pennies there's no end to it.
 Art, form and literary style are scrapped.
 The public's dull and journalists must bend to it.
 Great things and small must be in jargon wrapped ;
 And as for thought, the public is no friend to it.
 Elections, frauds, a crime, a railway strike,
 Exploring, science, all must look alike.

One day the boom is better household bread,
 The next the murder of a prostitute,
 The next the Churches, or how geese are fed,
 Or a divorce or breach-of-promise suit.
 The whole of life is covered, A to Z,
 But nothing's ever given time to root.
 A shock, a thrill, at best a soporific,
 Are gotten by this industry prolific.

Its basis is the blood-and-thunder tale
 Or sentimental sugared novelette,
 And ere the appetite for them shall fail
 The sun shall on the British Empire set.
 They're hanging in a nicely balanced scale.
 It's hard to see how it can be upset.
 Excited, doped, the proletariat
 Can never know what they are getting at.

So when they're told, day in, day out, that they
 Are greater far than either Greece or Rome,
 They gulp it down and are content to pay
 For greatness brought into the humble home.
 They dream that Greece and Rome have passed away
 Perhaps because Great Britain rules the foam.
 The blood and thunder passed with Mr Kruger,
 Now they can eat the sentimental sugar.

Half-civilised, their thoughts are all fantastic,
 Just dreams their writers tickle out of sleep
 And colour with a wild, enthusiastic
 Belief in calling monsters from the deep.
 Their minds are yet more stiff and inelastic
 Than when they made poor ardent Shelley weep.
 Their sleep on poetry has set a ban,
 Their spirit is expressed in *Peter Pan*.

Ethereal Shelley ! Feeling in thy bones
 In what small room dear Freedom must be bound,
 Thou heard'st the people's sighs and bitter groans
 And show'dst them where sweet music could be found.
 Now they have music on their gramophones
 And Lauder is than thou far more renowned.
 But there's no room for spirits so ethereal,
 Since England's great and Liberal-Imperial.

The poets used to look to France for healing,
 But now that France is safely in our pocket
 We can fall back on our reserve of feeling.
 Our store is there ; we've only to unlock it.
 We keep it locked, in terror of revealing
 How we have burned the candle to the socket.
 We know, alas ! there have been secret orgies
 Through all the righteous ages since the Georges.

It seems you can't be Liberal without
 Some liberation of humane desire.
 The problem is how we're to let it out,
 And yet not set our social house on fire ;
 And how to bring the Tories to a rout
 Without their dragging us into the mire.
 We might have got the Tories sent to Hell
 And won Home Rule but for *l'affaire* Parnell.

The Irish might have helped us out and got
 The Tories dished without South Africa.
 We might have won the country scot and lot
 And done without the Empire and the star
 Of Cecil Rhodes and left the Jingo rot
 To cranks who'd soon have been unpopular.
 We might have made a very different bid,
 But things have gone quite well on what we did.

We've had ten years of feverish excitement
 And kept our jobs with periodic changes,
 We've shown quite clearly what the Tory fight meant,
 And how much farther our idea ranges.
 Our every Act has been a strong indictment
 Of Torydom. But what seems very strange is
 That with retrenchment and reform in stock,
 The world's our cradle but it will not rock.

Our baby is the human race, but still
 It seems uneasy, restless, difficult.
 It sometimes looks as though it must be ill,
 Our lullaby Imperial don't lull't.
 The case defies our diagnostic skill.
 We daren't prescribe for fear of the result.
 We've tried our patent Liberal emulsions,
 Perhaps they'll save the infant from convulsions.

We'll take to prayer and call it Mental Science,
 Relying on our trained gymnastic Souls.
 We've got, thank God, the Franco-Russ alliance,
 To keep it warm we'll go on burning coals.
 Let others waste their breath in hot defiance,
 Our ports and ships shall go on taking tolls.
 It's clear that at the polls we can't be beat
 As long as we don't tamper with the Fleet.

That's all we know and all we need to know.
 There's not a vote to capture with Free Trade,
 Which passed beyond discussion long ago.
 Of ground-rents there is little to be made.
 Insurance cards have made a sorry show,
 And possibly the House was best unpaid.
 The Webbs have told us to reform the work'uses,
 But we have got to give the public circuses.

And, on the whole, perhaps we might do worse.
 We cannot think for all the human race.
 The cradle will not rock, let others nurse
 The brat and wipe its ugly, fractious face.
 We'll think of nothing but the British purse
 And do our best to keep our friends in place.
 We've had enough of patching-up and mending.
 The money's there. The public's all for spending.

The Government departments are too small ;
 They don't make half the show they ought to.
 There's more display in Manchester's Town Hall,
 And no one will respect us till they're taught to.
 It may be true that pride precedes a fall,
 But pride of Empire is what we are brought to.
 We've got to please the public, or go under,
 And we must keep them in a state of wonder.

The War Office is shabby in Pall Mall;
 And though we have no thought of war or fighting,
 A nobler building would be just as well,
 With fifteen hundred clerks all busy writing.
 Inspiring thought! But, if the Army's swell,
 The Navy's sweller and won't stand such slighting.
 The Admiralty building shall be bigger
 To let the Navy cut a finer figure.

And on its roof the wireless shall raise
 (A tender subject. Let us be discreet)
 Its antennæ to Heaven in such praise
 As never architect could hope to beat.
 O'er all the Empire it shall send its rays,
 Likewise impress the people in the street.
 Its thin tall masts, ascending and aerial,
 Shall crown our structure Liberal-Imperial.

V

BEFORE we mark the sequel let us visit
 In turn each class at home, from Kew to Bow,
 From Golder's Green to Brixton ; not to quiz it,
 But to discover what they have to show.
 Armed with Who's Who, a Year-book, a Where-is-it ?
 From north to south and east to west we'll go,
 By bus and Tube. We'll scan our fellow-travellers
 For hints to aid our work as Life-unravellers.

And first a Duke whose income is about
 A quarter of a million, got from rent,
 Ground-rent and way-leaves, and from coal dug out
 From land he's never seen, on which he's spent
 Not twopence, though it's his without a doubt
 For being born. It's his past argument.
 The tenants show him almost feudal loyalty.
 On all their work he takes a handsome royalty.

His seat is furnished like a Strand hotel
 (The pictures show his ancestors had taste).
 He's married, say, a rich Chicago belle,
 Who cultivates the Royal bust and waist,
 And studies the topography of Hell
 To castigate the wicked and unchaste,
 Believing England's moral force dependent
 Upon the line from which her Duke's descendant.

The Duke himself is rather isolated,
 And no one cares or wants him very much.
 The House of Lords is half-disintegrated ;
 The country's life it never seems to touch.
 And though his birthday every year is fêted,
 His life is like a rabbit's in a hutch.
 A parlour pet, he's in a sorry fix,
 For he's forgotten all his parlour tricks.

A century ago he might have had
 With far less money a much better time.
 For brilliant people would have been quite glad
 To stay with him, and poets with their rhyme
 His praises would have sung. Now people bad
 Just use him in their weary social climb.
 His ancient name is useful to promoters,
 Or to impress the sleepy rural voters.

He goes to Court in full dress and regalia,
 Attends the opening of Parliament,
 Goes racing, shooting, stalking, inter alia,
 And need not think of how much he has spent,
 And travel gives him ample marginalia
 Of pleasures, with the Duchess off the scent.
 And yet in nothing is there satisfaction ;
 His rank and wealth control his every action.

He cannot bear a hint of contradiction.
 His word is law or else he will not speak.
 The slightest hint of any kind of friction
 Will make him lose his temper for a week.
 An independent thought is an infliction
 Which he regards as a malicious freak.
 He and the Duchess every night play Halma ;
 The family's done nothing since the Alma.

But if you go from Manchester to Bolton
 You'll see his name on passing railway trucks.
 A kind of fame he shares with Henry Doulton,
 Who in that kind of fame is surely *dux*.
 In crucibles the human race is molten,
 But he is at the cool end of the flux.
 That's all he does and all he is, a lily
 Which, lacking beauty, cannot but look silly.

Yet his existence is the perfect model
 The highest Englishmen can hope to reach.
 An English boy, as soon as he can toddle,
 Is shown this life as past the bounds of speech,
 And he's a tick, a swat, a mollycoddle,
 Who looks at other pebbles on the beach.
 A life of manly, gentlemanly sport,
 A house in town and access to the Court.

What more could man desire? In autumn grouse,
 In winter pheasants, hundreds in a day,
 And hounds, a drag, a Leicester country house,
 Young people ragging, while their elders play.
 O! he must have the spirit of a louse
 Who's offered these and turns his thoughts away.
 Domestic servants read with shining eyes
 Of such a life as it were Paradise.

Yet all cannot attain it, for it needs
 A special kind of training, starting young.
 At Public Schools the well-selected seeds
 Are planted and manured with special dung
 Of rooted prejudice, and all the weeds
 Of thought and fancy to the winds are flung.
 And by the time a boy is sent to college
 He thoroughly despises all his knowledge.

He'll spend a few absurd years in the Guards,
 Or, if the F.O. takes him, he will give
 An hour or two of work which he discards
 For lunching with some wealthy relative,
 A boring aunt whose generous regards
 Fill him with hopes she has not long to live.
 And when she dies and leaves him her estate,
 Though rich himself he seeks a richer mate.

Two thousand pounds a year, he thinks, is just
 Enough for him to keep in with the keepers,
 And if his place is in the upper crust,
 That is, among the privileged, the reapers
 Of other people's sowing, then he must
 Accept the tendrils of those climbing creepers,
 The rich mammas, with daughters highly finished,
 Designed for swells whose fortunes are diminished.

Exactly for such couples Mendelssohn
 Composed his Wedding March. So let us leave them,
 For ever bound, each bound to live alone
 Among the kind of people who'll receive them.
 They think they've made the best of life their own,
 But you and I, who know, cannot believe them.
 Their life's a lie. The woman needs to feign it.
 We'll go among the folks who can't attain it.

'Tis sour grapes, but there is other fruit,
 And many have a preference for plums.
 The grape's for bed-sides. People of repute
 Like picking at a pie with their two thumbs.
 They like to feel their pleasure's also loot
 Round which a waspish competition hums.
 The ordinary human mind must covet
 Before it tastes its pleasure or can love it.

So now we have the bees and wasps about
 Our ears and hardly know what we are doing.
 In other words, we're fairly in the rout
 Politico-financial, where is brewing
 A constant mischief, half of which comes out.
 The other half remains for ever stewing.
 And in the stew good brains are boiled to rags,
 And yet the zeal for pleasure never flags.

Excitement were a better word, since all
 Is boiled down to sensation, nothing higher,
 Nothing subtler. There's nothing great or small
 But it is used to slake a hot desire
 To have things piping hot or not at all.
 A constant titillation they require
 With novelty and strangeness at their call.
 They'll go all lengths to gratify their senses
 And worship those who give them new pretences.

The women leave their children to the nurse,
 Their men are off intriguing in the city,
 In Parliament, in clubs, in bars or worse.
 Their days are spent in trying to be witty
 At friends' expense; in dressing on a purse
 That should be large enough to make them pretty,
 And might do so but for their wayward passion
 For sacrificing Nature to the fashion.

They call on women whom they hate as chicer
 Or better dressed than they. They do their shopping,
 Write letters, telephone, read, talk and bicker,
 And bustle round, afraid of ever stopping,
 Support themselves with tea or other liquor,
 And will not take a rest although they're dropping.
 Their constant dread is lest they might be losing
 Some novelty their set has found amusing.

Upon their lips a constant tittle-tattle
 Of pictures, music, books, and food and men,
 Old furniture and china—rattle, rattle,
 And all the doings underneath Big Ben,
 How husbands are the queerest kind of cattle,
 How lovers are wellnigh as queer again.
 And when they talk of scandal and divorces,
 One understands Swift's preference for horses.

The part they play in intrigue and affairs
 Is disproportionate to what they understand,
 But when things are reduced to splitting hairs
 Appropriately then they take a hand.
 Their artifice, their little charms and snares,
 Will often serve important fish to land.
 It seems to them nor cynical nor cruel
 When services are paid for with a jewel.

Another step reveals the world of letters,
 Of plays (which pay the most), revues and books,
 Where authors male and female ape their betters
 As far as income goes and food and looks.
 They shackle on themselves the money fetters,
 But even then they live on tenterhooks
 Lest they should lose their *flair* and run to seed
 And write the stuff that no one wants to read.

We've reached perhaps the most amusing lot
 That ever were collected on the globe.
 They're grouped like savages around a pot
 In which for pickings thumbs and fingers probe.
 Their appetite would shame a Hottentot,
 Their patience and endurance beggar Job,
 For his great itch afflicted but his skin,
 While theirs is partly outward, more within.

An itch for praise and general applause,
 An itch for seeing their great names in print,
 An itch to seem to stand for some high cause,
 An itch to be a rival to the Mint,
 An itch to be a peacock among daws,
 An itch to be beyond the slightest hint
 Of failure or unpopular opinions,
 Which might scare off the crowd of useful minions.

They think the nothing which is always right ;
 And ambiguity to such a point
 They've brought that they can always sit and write
 Two thousand words of humbug to anoint
 Whatever movement brings a prize in sight.
 They'll even say the times are out of joint
 (Although they love them) to keep out a rival
 From whom they've lost all hope of a connival.

They know or know the names of everybody
 Worth the knowing. They talk of sales and prices
 Both old and new from Dickens to Tom Noddy,
 And credit half their world with secret vices,
 The other half with perpetrating shoddy.
 A constant spite their conversation spices.
 One lucky hit will make a great career.
 The same old book comes out year after year.

This entertaining gang's a kind of junction
 Between the upper and the upper-middle.
 It exercises a most useful function
 Resembling that of Messrs Scott and Liddell
 Between two worlds, and it has no compunction
 In using words the hungry mind to diddle.
 It is a brake, all new ideas curbing,
 Which in the monied world might be disturbing.

It keeps the British public from approaching
 A vital thought until it has been chewed
 For thirty years at least by countries broaching
 The vat of thought with vigour still renewed.
 It keeps new life from living and encroaching
 On the preserves of conscious rectitude.
 It hides away the kind of truth that matters,
 And clothes the public mind in rags and tatters.

They have a varied stock of reach-me-downs,
 They reconcile the Bible's God and science
 For anxious people in provincial towns
 Who on their double words have full reliance.
 With adjectives they qualify their nouns
 Till sense and meaning are set at defiance.
 They've all the proper sentiments on tap
 When fact in fiction shows a horrid gap.

They sentimentalise the simpler feelings
 And blow them out until they're like balloons.
 And all the subtler, finer human dealings,
 Unfit for pleasant Sunday afternoons,
 Are made to look obscene, the lustful squealings
 Of creatures far too like and near baboons.
 Sweet fancy's sent aloft in coloured toys,
 And gone from earth are all our human joys.

Of course the danger is that, by extracting
 The fancy and the obvious delights,
 What's left, since Nature's constantly exacting,
 Will grudge the pleasure of these pretty flights.
 And passion too will join in such play-acting
 And seek the little thrill of flying kites.
 So love and energy are dissipated.
 What should be loved is now reviled and hated.

And in the end a wistful melancholy
 Plays comie tunes upon a penny whistle,
 And English humour, sane, robust and jolly,
 Can find no rose and puts up with a thistle ;
 And lacking myrtle, plucks instead the holly ;
 And wanting beef will gnaw at bone and gristle.
 And when it's bored with that, then back it comes
 To feed on literary sugar-plums.

What makes things worse, our cousin and our scholar,
 America, still looks across the ocean
 For mental fare, and the almighty dollar
 Commands a stream of spurious emotion,
 Which English writers struggle for and collar
 And labour in with highly paid devotion.
 Balloons and coloured toys are sent so high
 Inflated fancy fails and will not fly.

Immortal Fancy ! Tumbled in the dust,
 Or fled to other minds and other seenes,
 Thou wast affrighted by the noxious lust
 That emanated from the magazines.
 On England thou hadst laid a special trust,
 For only England knows what Fancy means.
 Immortal, incorruptible thou art !
 Thou hast but fled the clatter of the mart.

Thy name in vain is taken and indited,
 And thou art made to seem a soft denial
 Of truth and beauty for the dull, benighted
 And illiterate. Thy precious phial,
 The distillation of all joys delighted,
 That sent the hours spinning round the dial,
 They sought to empty at one greedy gulp.
 It turned to poison and their minds to pulp.

Now let's pass on. The sight is too depressing
 And there is surely something less corrupt.
 With modern progress some must be proccessing.
 The end of all cannot be so abrupt,
 There must be something worth a word of blessing.
 We'll look for it when we have dined and supped,
 And plucked up courage for the final burst,
 And hope, believing we have faced the worst.

There's beauty in machines, in chimneys, smoke,
 Red tramcars, buses, market-garden drays.
 A coloured poster's oft a lovely joke.
 The Café Royal's worth a dozen plays.
 Let Puritans and parsons have their croak,
 Here painters seek relief from toil-worn days.
 Here where the wit of Oscar flashed and glanced
 Are gathered nightly all the most advanced.

The energy that goes in talk of paint
 Around the little shining marble tables
 Is almost free from the commercial taint
 And all the common sentimental fables.
 Its patron is one John, though not the saint,
 A Hercules who's cleansed Augean stables.
 He and the Slade have caused a great upheaval
 And made Art primitive, if not primeval.

Life follows art and on the seats of plush
 Are women straight from canvas and three-ply.
 They sit and smile Johnesquely at the crush
 Of eager students waiting breathlessly
 For chatter to die down into the hush
 Which means that Art's Messiah is hard by.
 Apostles enter. That means He is coming.
 Suppressed emotion keeps the Café humming.

A great man by the silence he compels
 Is known and knows himself how great he is ;
 There's nothing else that quite so plainly tells
 Him that the public's drowsy ear is his.
 His "Yes" is the most potent of all spells,
 His "No" the key to all life's mysteries.
 He need not say a single other word.
 While he is there no other voice is heard.

This might go on for ever, were the dead
 As easily imposed on as the quick.
 An artist quite forgotten rears his head
 And shies into the silence, like a brick,
 The truth for which he suffered, fought and bled ;
 He shatters silence in the very nick
 Of time to save a good man from descending
 To homage from the semi-comprehending.

So from the fancy that in one huge leap
 Art sprang direct from Giotto to the Slade,
 The Café Royalists, as from a sleep,
 Awoke to find there'd been a sudden raid.
 From Paris, whence all subtle movements creep,
 There'd come a revolution in the trade.
 That British art was deader than Queen Anne
 Was proved by Gauguin, Van Gogh and Cézanne.

They had discovered that the modern world
 Was modern and that art had lagged behind
 Along with letters, morals, and the curled
 And foppish fancies of the antique mind.
 The banner of antiquity was furled
 When Cézanne's first great masterpiece was signed.
 Henceforth to find a mathematic beauty
 Became the painter's first and only duty.

The point is moot if truth half-understood
 Is better than a falsehood wholly mastered,
 And if a queer but rightly gotten brood
 Is better than a trim and shapely bastard.
 A glance at letters makes the answer good,
 For there is art with pretty lies all plastered,
 And it is dull. The painters go exploring,
 What they bring back is strange but rarely boring.

It may bewilder. Wherefore should it not ?
 Is truth then so familiar to our minds
 That there is no new pleasure to be got
 When contemplation some new aspect finds ?
 Are we so sure that everything is rot
 That is not known as one of two-three kinds ?
 An artist's not an object of derision
 Because he loves the logic of his vision.

Old painters' logic stopped short at perspective,
 But many had no logic to stop short.
 Their vision was conventional, collective,
 And never came from what they felt or thought.
 They aimed at being thoroughly objective.
 Their work was but another kind of sport.
 They painted skies and sunsets, rivers, trees,
 With just such art as they had learned would please.

Pleasure again ! The old trick of beguiling,
 Of giving sweetmeats to the soul for bread,
 Of covering cold villainy with smiling,
 Of aiming at the pocket not the head.
 With pleasure we are all bent on defiling
 The little good that's left us by the dead.
 But some small truth has crept into our paint.
 In other arts we'd try it but we mayn't.

The public spurns it for it might upset
 Our curates, virgins, householders and matrons.
 The painters are not caught within the net
 Of public pleasure, but live on their patrons.
 And therefore they are free and they are let
 Alone to follow art, and, while a spate runs,
 To use its force, to shape what they have found,
 Before the stream once more slips underground.

But all the rest who have to live by fame,
 An airy diet, got by flams and flukes,
 And carefully avoiding risk of blame,
 Are in their work like so many S. Lukes,
 All hearsay, which from first to last is tame,
 Because they dare not face old men's rebukes.
 In vain they wriggle, turn and twist and dodge.
 The public must have trifles or else stodge.

A man must please to live who lives to please.
 The old tag's trotted out with certain rules.
 The public will not think, for thought must freeze
 The warm emotions which in stagnant pools
 Lie open to the fancy's pleasant breeze.
 That's all they want. They're obstinate as mules.
 A ripple on their smooth and sluggish feeling,
 They call that beauty, light, refreshment, healing.

The favourite prescription is to mix
 Religion up with lust, to show a whore
 In nunnish garb prevailing by her tricks
 O'er chivalry which brings her back once more
 Beneath the shadow of the crucifix,
 Both being then of Heaven very sure.
 This makes the best of both the worlds and shows
 That both are softer than one might suppose.

You must not hint that marriages are not
 Invariably blissful ; that a child
 So far from being Heaven-sent was got
 By accident ; that women aren't defiled
 If they, in love, accept their woman's lot
 And go unwed ; that if a man has piled
 His money up, he may be rather worse
 Than any little thief who cuts a purse.

You may not hint that Man is still untamed,
 And will not shape his soul to outward things,
 And will not take the laws dead men have framed
 To be his world unless his spirit sings
 That here is truth, that here all unashamed
 He can unfold his wide imagined wings.
 For man in England wastes his life pretending
 His world is perfect but himself wants mending.

So down we drop from paint-encouraged vision
 To ease and cushioned mediocrity,
 Where everything is marked out with precision
 To be the kind of thing it ought to be.
 And this is reached by process of elision
 Of all that threatens soft security.
 Here men are honest, as the rich are snobs.
 For, if they were not, they would lose their jobs.

See from the suburbs every day they go,
 Black-coated, upright, worthy, stolid, smug,
 From little red-brick houses in a row,
 All neat and clean, immune from flea and bug.
 The daily paper tells them all they know
 And anxiously that little all they hug,
 Not quite believing it is all it seems,
 But right because it saves them from their dreams.

For dreams are wicked. They've a way of running
 On independent lines and bringing doubt,
 The very thing our honest man is shunning.
 For which he weaves about him and about
 Religion, morals, and a web of cunning
 To keep his soul and human nature out.
 The lack of dreams may make his life grow cold,
 But what he wants is safety when he's old.

He has a wife, although he never sought one.
 But there were girls, disturbing and attractive,
 When he was young, and then he found he'd caught one.
 And they were married. She was good and active.
 He couldn't have done better if he'd bought one.
 He'd never dream of going from the pact if
 A thousand houris for a thousand nights
 Assailed him. He insists on married rights.

He's had the family he could afford,
 A matter of the nicest calculation.
 Without disturbing his invested hoard,
 He's faced their illnesses and education ;
 He's brought them up to see in him their lord,
 Their moral pattern, type for emulation.
 He's made them swallow every moral platitude
 And mopes because they seem to fail in gratitude.

His savings are most carefully invested
 In little parcels ; much less chance of losing.
 The little devil Risk he feels he's bested
 When in the morning train he sits perusing
 The list of stocks in which he's interested
 And makes a list of others for his choosing.
 And all the while you think he's dully mooning
 His profitable stocks and shares he's pruning.

It is a triumph of the human wit
 How he'll divide and then divide again,
 Until he's built up, slowly, bit by bit,
 Another world of species wherein men
 Don't count at all except as slaves to it,
 And he himself is but a scratching pen.
 It is a world, quite empty, cold, abstract,
 The only world whose science is exact.

It is his god, exacting sacrifice
 Of courage, fun, affection, kindness, all
 The sense of good and evil, virtue, vice,
 The knowledge which Man paid for in his fall;
 All but existence is the heavy price
 For which this cruel god of his will call.
 And so, existing, cold and unforgiving,
 He rigs a scale of values for his living.

Or rather he can buy them from a church
 Or chapel by attendance regular,
 Procuring for himself a certain perch
 Above the place where wicked sinners are;
 For, having left his conscience in the lurch,
 He thinks himself God's chosen seminar.
 He can sincerely think himself religious.
 This god of his than God is more prodigious.

God who created man is nothing like
 So powerful in man's mundane affairs
 As Man's created god who'll blast and strike
 One half the human race and load with cares
 The other half and make them hack and spike
 Each other, while his priests the Bulls and Bears
 Attend, the bloodshed and the filth unheeding,
 On money's strange hermaphroditic breeding.

And England's strength is in her honest folk,
Her Bulls and Bears, her priests of Man's new god,
Himself a world to whom this world's a joke
And Man a creature better 'neath the sod,
Though given time to weep and breed and stoke
The furnaces beneath starvation's rod.
As marriage glosses joys and sins venereal,
This has its varnish Liberal-Imperial.

VI

THERE at a glance we've caught the leading lines
On which, with variations, England's built.
We've seen the aims to which her mind inclines.
The god for whom her heroes' blood was spilt.
We've seen enough to know that her designs
Upon the human race are free from guilt.
We've touched, I think, her most essential nerve
And broken down her habit of reserve.

Her pride is justified, not overweening.
In all the world there's naught like English credit.
Our statesmen's words are always full of meaning ;
You know that when they've said a thing they've said it.
None of your silly rhetorician's preening,
Which newspapers will ruthlessly sub-edit.
Our word's our bond, our bond's as good as gold,
So other countries must do what they're told.

The world's our oyster. We have had the fish.
The rest may fight and squabble for the shells.
They'll be kept busy. We shall have our wish,
And live in quiet, counting up our L's,
Our S's and our D's, and we shall dish,
As we have always done, the German swells,
Whose high ambition drives them nearly frantic
Because we stand 'twixt them and the Atlantic.

The British Empire's mistress of the seas,
 Though what that means we don't precisely know.
 We cannot do with them just as we please,
 Or say what ships thereon shall come and go.
 But if we say the moon is made of cheese,
 We'll make the world agree that it is so.
 And when we say Britannia rules the ocean,
 We'll make a show of force to back the notion.

Perhaps it is old-fashioned in these days,
 When all the nations' lives are interwoven,
 But we have found and still find that it pays,
 Until a change of living's wholly proven,
 To keep the shibboleths of our old ways
 And think the German foot is really cloven.
 The Navy's kept to see that we aren't slaves
 And looks for cloven footprints on the waves.

Without the Navy we should never know
 If we were free or not. We'd have to think
 And look into the matter. That might throw
 A light upon the things we always blink.
 And it would never do, for long ago
 We learned like squids to throw a cloud of ink
 About us when we talked of Liberty,
 Not knowing what we meant by being free.

As long as there's the Navy there's no doubt
 That we are free. The Navy guarantees it.
 The flag's the flag of freedom. Hang it out.
 The Briton knows his freedom when he sees it,
 And doesn't need to plague his wits about
 His Liberty, for thought would only freeze it.
 Without the Navy there would be no proof,
 And slavery might show its cloven hoof.

As long as there's the Navy we can keep
 Our commerce built up on the small investor.
 Democracy can safely go to sleep
 And trust the wisdom of some Jewish Nestor
 To see that swelling dividends shall creep
 To pockets wide agape in towns like Leicester
 Or Nottingham or Manchester or Leeds
 Or any place where money spawns and breeds.

As long as there's a Flag idealism
 Can find an outlet and yet not disturb
 The small investor, and no cataclysm
 Can break the spell cast by the holy verb,
 Invest. Directly there are signs of schism
 The Flag is raised and quickly puts a curb
 On human hopes, desires and aspiration
 Which might break up the concord of the nation.

For since we're all agreed on getting rich
 And paying through the nose for evidence
 Of Liberty, we can't have feelings which
 Defy the tight control of common-sense
 And cash. But they may reach a certain pitch
 In shouting for the Navy, Home Defence
 And Military Training. There's no harm
 In keeping up a tickling of alarm.

An unexcited too-well-foddered cow
 Will come to milking with an empty udder.
 A peaceful people, like the English now,
 Are all the better for a timely shudder.
 And since we simply dare not tell them how
 The ship of State's at sea without its rudder,
 Their flesh is made to tingle by the Press,
 Which talks of war and unpreparedness.

That always does the trick and we can vote
 More money for more ships and mighty guns.
 A slight mishap, a diplomatic note
 Will shadow war, and fifty millions
 Will be expended on an antidote.
 The public money through our fingers runs.
 The crisis over, papers cease their raving,
 The small investor goes on saving, saving.

He's had his bit in Kynoch's, Armstrong's, Vicker's,
 And done quite well and never lost his sleep.
 He's grateful for these periodic bickers,
 Which raise the wool on his financial sheep.
 The game is worth the candle though it flickers
 Too near the powder, giving him a creep.
 He's played the game and had no accident.
 He trusts the caution of his Government.

They dare not let him know how close they shave,
 Nor that the game is just as popular
 In other countries, where the people save
 And gamble on the chances of a war,
 Imagining that they can always stave
 Disaster off by seeing that they are
 So well equipped that when they show their teeth
 The half-drawn sword will drop back in its sheath.

The Germans are a race whose innocence
 Is inconceivable and yet a fact.
 Beguiled by the success of our pretence,
 And seeing how the world has been ransacked,
 They want to do it too and set their pence
 Abreeding till another cataract
 Of wealth shall flow upon this luckless planet,
 And if it's drowned they'll say that we began it.

The things in which we only half believe
 And play with as a game, from laziness,
 Are serious to them. They cannot thieve
 Like gentlemen for fun, and our success
 Is never due to cards kept up our sleeve,
 But, as they think, to what we praise and bless
 In public—God, the Navy, work and trade,
 And industry and science, and gold braid.

Gold braid is easily procured, and God
 Has always honoured Luther's countrymen.
 If science needs a brain content to plod,
 The German is as patient as a hen.
 At sea the German has been Ichabod,
 The Hanseatic League shall live again.
 The German Empire, heir direct of Rome,
 Shall make the British anthem "Home Sweet Home."

So we were imitated but not flattered.
 The Germans held the wrong end of the stick.
 They'd disregarded everything that mattered.
 Their emulation stung us to the quick.
 By holding up the mirror, they had shattered
 Illusions which had served us through the thick
 Of half-a-century's mistakes and messes.
 It seems that half our truths were only guesses.

We haven't put the world to rights or set
 A proud example which no race can follow.
 The triumphs of the British bayonet
 Are not so solid as they seemed, but hollow.
 Our aims were Liberal and noble, yet
 In other minds we find them hard to swallow.
 We never thought the seeds of Empire sown
 By us would be to other countries blown.

We paid the Germans, paid them handsomely,
 To help put down the French when Boney tried
 To start an Empire with artillery.
 And we approved conscription to provide
 An army for our use across the sea,
 And then we flung our Empire far and wide.
 We thought that if we showed them how to do it
 The others would keep quiet and eschew it.

And now we get this horrible lampoon,
 Our mercenaries actually trading,
 And they whom Pitt & Co. fed with a spoon,
 Pretend to understand a Bill of Lading.
 We paid the piper, we should call the tune.
 Buffoonery like this is most degrading.
 To let the German have a carpet bag
 Insults our commerce and the British flag.

Put down your carpet bag and take your rifle.
 That is your job. Your only trade is war.
 With solemn things like trade you must not trifle.
 Let music keep you happy as you are.
 You sit and dream of storming the Tour Eiffel,
 Let Strauss and Wagner be your avatar.
 The sea will drown the glowing little spark
 Thrown out and blown by Moltke and Bismarck.

Meanwhile they're very useful as a scare
 To keep the British voter up to scratch.
 We'll let them be our masters in the air,
 At sea we'll be quite easily their match.
 We are an island and we do not care,
 And happy shall be Germany's despatch.
 When all is said, their Empire is ramshackle,
 And we're a toughish customer to tackle.

They've only learned the rudiments of trade,
 The headline gospel of the red-hot Jingo.
 As soon expect from them a naval raid
 As seek along the River Thames flamingoes.
 And if you'd know the stuff whereof they're made
 Just set their beer against our good old Stingoes.
 We used to talk like that about the French.
 However, that was dropped without a wrench.

Then why not drop it now against the new
 Alarm and bogey? We have guaranteed
 The peace of Europe. We command the blue,
 And everyone but Germany's agreed
 That on the whole we do it nicely too.
 But German eagles, more like vultures, feed
 On German blood, pretending that they are
 Prohibiting the smallest chance of war.

We all love peace. That is our postulate.
 All Christians, we are prepared to spend
 On armaments, while social problems wait
 Until they can produce a dividend.
 Peace is the British Navy's precious freight.
 Peace is the German Army's noble end.
 If we are right the Germans must be wrong.
 In time they'll learn to sing another song.

And while they learn to sing it we will turn
 Our minds upon the question of Home Rule,
 A question which has almost ceased to burn,
 So potent has the Empire been to cool
 All heated points. Home Rule lies far astern.
 Between the parties we might make a pool
 And would do so but for the Tory Rump
 Who won't renounce the pleasures of the stump.

It's true, of course, that freedom is the flag,
 Or vice versa ; yet it's disconcerting
 To find in Ulster men who love the rag
 And go about ferociously asserting
 That Home Rule's freedom in a gladstone bag,
 A view from which there's no hope of converting
 The Orangeman who hates the Catholics
 And will not trust them with his politics.

The flag of Empire waves o'er proud Belfast,
 O'er Dublin waves the lovely Irish green,
 But Ulster nails the colours to the mast ;
 And never has such love of Empire been
 As in the dauntless rebels holding fast
 And trying hard to say just what they mean.
 A Dublin lawyer helps them to be vocal
 And says that Irish politics aren't local.

Whatever Dublin is Belfast is not.
 And Dublin's hopelessly behind the times.
 Whatever riches Ireland has got
 She owes to Ulster. A. E. may make rhymes,
 And Willy Yeats may sing the bee-loud grot,
 And scrape together Yankee cents and dimes.
 But in Belfast are men who've made their pile.
 Their money is on Empire all the while.

Belfast builds ships and there's no Irish navy—
 And never will be one—no Irish coal.
 Home Rule will be roast beef without the gravy,
 A gross and pompous body with no soul.
 Belfast will not be treated like a slavey
 And given notice. Ireland as a whole
 May be content to like it or to lump it,
 But Ulster is the British Empire's trumpet.

And so at last we see the Tories working
 To show that they and they alone can cry
 The Empire as it should be cried, not shirking
 The issue, as the Liberals, who try
 To be Imperial but can't help burking
 The mandate laid on Empire from on high.
 From Ulster's trumpet comes a mighty blast.
 The Tories have a battle-cry at last.

They have the Army on their side and find
 That Britain hardly knew it had one till
 Its disaffection served to call to mind
 The fact that it was there, well trained to kill,
 Although its oath could not be held to bind
 Against the loyal rebels whose firm will
 Would never bend the knee to such dictators
 As Mr Asquith and his gang of traitors.

They weren't Imperial enough, they'd sold
 The country time and time again to keep
 Themselves in place, their betters in the cold.
 They seemed to think the Irish were like sheep
 To be penned up for shearing in a fold.
 But Ulster would rouse Britain from her sleep
 And show her, though the process might be gory,
 The road to Empire by the path of glory.

Retired colonels looked up army manuals
 And got their wives to furbish up their kit.
 They blossomed out like healthy hardy annuals.
 They drilled the Orangemen to do their bit.
 There was no lack of newspaper Emmanuels
 To show that they had such a candle lit
 As would not be put out for generations,
 In spite of Dublin's wicked machinations.

In London this great patriotic rally
 Produced some small sensation, very small
 Compared with that aroused by Russian Ballet,
 Or some great masquerade at Albert Hall,
 Or Mdlle Deslys becoming pally
 With J. M. Barrie at whose party all
 Society was kinematographed
 And in a way ticked off and epitaphed.

The Cabinet could easily outwit
 This last ingenious and bold finesse.
 They held the cards and could well wait a bit
 And let the Tories have their fancy-dress
 And martial games. The country laughed at it
 And thought it was concocted by the Press.
 Devotion to the Empire in Belfast
 Was far too good a joke for it to last.

And yet somehow the country was impressed.
 The Tories had not altogether failed.
 The country felt once more that it possessed
 An Empire, and that Empire still entailed
 A flag, a fleet, an army and the rest
 As in the works of Kipling they're regaled.
 The Empire felt the Tories' bold manœuvre
 From Wellington N.Z. to far Vancouver.

Lo! then the Empire in the hour of danger
 With civil war almost accomplished fact.
 The soul of Empire, not by any stranger
 But by the Government had been attacked.
 The Tory dog, still snarling in its manger,
 Was half-astonished that it was not smacked.
 But no one smacked it. Liberals were busy
 In learning Empire to out-Dizzy Dizzy.

Hark ! how the heart of Empire thumps and knocks.
The Liberals, determined to outdo
The Tory's Ulster pageant, crow like cocks
And say that they have brilliant plumage too.
The feast demands a sacrificial ox,
Some costly show, a grand Spithead review.
The bluff decried as actor-managerial,
Is nothing to the Liberal-Imperial.

VII

BUT while the fleets to Spithead steamed, consuming
A million tons of most expensive coal,
And while King Carson in Belfast was fuming
And keeping up his complicated rôle,
The meagre shadow of King Death came looming
And took an Austrian Archduke in toll.
The contact of this Prince with the unseen
Produced the spark to fire the magazine.

The painted structure of the Jingo powers
Was soon alight and fast burned to the ground,
And peaceful talk in copious fine showers
Was poured upon the charred and steaming mound ;
Yet in a few enraged and fevered hours
An outlet for the people's rage was found.
Before they saw how they had all been cheated
Their reason was by talk of war unseated.

The ships and guns and engines of their pride
Were used at last upon trumped-up excuses.
The clamour of the war was made to hide
The fact that all the old well-worn abuses
Of feudal days were kept to over-ride
Democracy and its more decent uses.
The bubble of our European swagger
Was pricked by some obscure assassin's dagger.

The White Books, Green Books, Yellow Books and Red
 Give the excuses and the base events
 That led to Europe's manhood being bled
 To find out who's to blame. Young innocents
 By millions must be tortured, left for dead,
 Or blown to bits, because their Governments
 Had found it pay to bluster about peace
 And keep their ships and guns on the increase.

Their Governments had burned the candle at
 Both ends and some had burned it in the middle
 To have four ends to burn. Small wonder that
 When Europe was on fire they played the fiddle.
 They'd no more rabbits in the magic hat.
 They'd lost the answer to their pointless riddle.
 The peace their armed display had guaranteed
 Was proved to be a wretched broken reed.

The rest is history. For broken toys
 Called Empires and the trebly sacred right
 To sacrifice and crush the dearest joys
 Of human nature, we are in this plight.
 The human mind its hard-won skill employs
 In murder and the spread of dreadful night.
 And darker night and murder yet more grim
 Creep o'er the world where hope grows faint and dim.

There are some self-important fools who call
 This living, and they rub their hands, delighted
 To be observed as bearers of the pall
 That covers life. Because they're more excited
 The life they knew is bitterness and gall
 To them. They live in hopes of being knighted
 For services (well paid) in making guns
 And ammunition to mow down the Huns.

The Huns have been mowed down. So have the French.
 So have the English and the Russians, but
 There's nothing come of it but one long trench
 From Flanders to the Vosges, another cut
 From Poland to the Baltic. There's a stench,
 A plague of flies, a brand-new type of knut,
 Great grief and broken hearts, and shattered cities,
 And soldiers singing barrel-organ ditties.

And there are men with less luck than the dead
 Sent home without their legs, or arms, or hands,
 And paid for life enough to keep them fed,
 Just out of hunger's reach. The country stands
 By all its heroes. They shall all have bread,
 If nothing else. We meet the just demands
 Of charity. We'll see that no one's starved
 Who's had his power of work destroyed or halved.

We're proud of them and sorry they are mangled,
 But this is war and well worth such a price.
 The world is purged. Its luxury is strangled,
 Its lewdness clean cut out, its mortal vice
 Dissolved in blood and tears, and all new-fangled
 And troublesome ideas combed like lice.
 So these excited persons say. They revel
 In seeing life brought to its lowest level.

For there such fools can hope to understand it.
 It is no longer hard for them. It seems
 To fall out just as though they'd made and planned it.
 There's money in their pockets. Foolish dreams
 Of freedom's flame, the lunatics who fanned it,
 Are all put out like yesternight's moonbeams.
 Of dead men's mortal prowess they will boast
 While middle age is left to rule the roast.

A righteous war, for it was no one's will.
 We say it was the Germans : they to us
 A scornful finger point, but have their fill
 Of loot and lust and bloodshed. Ædipus
 Himself was not more horrified to kill
 Or slaughtered with a gentler animus.
 " I didn't want to do it," runs the song,
 And so we sing as War sweeps us along.

And no one wants to do it, yet it's done,
 Because we're all too terrified to stop.
 Like trippers on a tour of Dr Lunn
 We've got to see it through until we drop.
 The Germans want a playground in the sun ;
 We want the British Navy still on top.
 Yet both ambitions could be satisfied
 And neither would be wounded in their pride.

Because the Germans want to bask and lie
 Like turtles on some hot fantastic shore,
 There seems no reason why young men should die.
 Because the British nation still sets store
 On having ships which no one may defy,
 Along the coast from Plymouth to the Nore,
 It seems absurd that in the Dardanelles
 Young Turks should be mopped up with Lyddite shells.

Because the Russians want to carry grain,
 Which Europe badly needs, from Black Sea ports,
 It seems grotesque that Hindus should be slain,
 And Belgians have huge guns blow up their forts.
 Yet, having once got war upon the brain,
 It seems to some the noblest of all sports.
 They'll kill with just the same disgusted zest
 As fills a farmer blotting out a pest.

Why look for reason when the world is mad?
 Some nobly mad and others mad with lust
 And vile excitement, feeling half gone bad
 From long suppression, vigour gone to rust,
 Emotions crude as colours in a plaid.
 Some few hold reason as the dearest trust,
 And cherish it, the key to liberty
 Wherewith imagination sets men free.

Divine imagination! how denied,
 Abused and mocked thou art, how set at naught
 And sacrificed by men to fear and pride!
 Denying thee who never hast been bought,
 They seek revenge. Themselves are crucified.
 The meshes set for thee, themselves have caught.
 Still art thou free, still labouring to make
 A Heaven of whose joy all may partake.

Yet who shall heed thee? None, I fear, except
 And if thou wilt engage and guarantee
 To give one pound a week to all who've crept
 Forth from the womb to the obscurity
 Of human life, controlled by the inept,
 Conceited and cocksure plutocracy.
 If thou, Imagination, wilt provide
 A living wage, then all are on thy side.

There is the rub! That men must live and pay
 For rent and food and clothes and boots and drink,
 Insurance and their clubs on Saturday.
 And, till they've paid, they have no time to think.
 So cunning folk have always had their way,
 And seen to it that poorer men should sink
 To half-starvation, overworked, in debt,
 With just enough intelligence to bet.

From that to military discipline,
 With no responsibility, free food,
 And clothes and boots, a little cash thrown in,
 No women, open air, no time to brood,
 The change at first must seem as though some djinn
 Had touched the evil world and made it good.
 The end of all is filth and blood and death,
 But they've had time to draw one living breath.

We're born in filth and blood and all must die.
 What does it matter how or when we do it?
 We're told it's all to serve some purpose high,
 And those who told us spoke as though they knew it.
 And after all, what matter if they lie?
 They've bit this war off. We have got to chew it.
 We've tasted worse in peace, had less to eat,
 And this compared with that is quite a treat.

We're out from factory and den and mine,
 From slums and little houses in a row,
 From garish shops and stores. The air like wine,
 Like sweet new wine, makes heart and pulses go,
 And instincts bristle like a porcupine,
 And thoughts like clouds come, lumbering and slow,
 Across the sky, that never seemed so near,
 So like a roof to cover all things here.

We've seen the day go by from dawn to dark.
 There seems some sense in it, as if the sun
 Some purpose had, and knew the singing lark.
 The birds and beasts and all the jolly fun
 That lives in fields, were there for him to mark
 And count them up like Noah one by one.
 We've crawled upon our bellies in the loam.
 The smell of it was like the smell of home.

We've seen the seasons pass and in their motion
 There is an ordered dignity and power
 The like of which is in no human notion
 And yet is in the smallest hedgerow flower,
 Whose life is simple musical devotion
 A-trembling up to its ecstatic hour.
 We and the stars have slyly winked together
 To see the passing of the dirty weather.

We've had the rain and mud upon our skins,
 And frost into our very bones has bitten
 And frozen up our little store of sins.
 Our quondam pleasures into ice are smitten.
 It hardly seems to matter which side wins.
 That's all a part of what the scribes have written.
 They've lost the sense, born in the touch of earth,
 That knows how life is ever big with birth.

The rich men come and go and make a rattle,
 And generals are clad in red and gold,
 But so in sunlight is a herd of cattle,
 And sheep are golden in a Sussex fold,
 And mating birds don't need the sound of battle
 To make them proud, magnificent and bold.
 Enough for them that there is life and beauty.
 They do not know or need another duty.

There has been death, a going to the earth,
 Unblessed, unconsecrated, unprepared,
 A dying of the melancholy dearth
 Of Love wherein humanity is snared.
 Yet earth's renewed, unfathomable mirth
 Sang through the living as they deathward fared.
 The heart of knowledge in their hearts again
 Made life so sweet that dying is in vain.

Where's your pretences now, your fabled glory,
 Your monied liberty whose foolish light
 But flickered through a dull old woman's story
 Of narrow good and evil, wrong and right,
 Of Church and State and Liberal and Tory
 Whose slavery with wages cast a blight
 Upon all human life, that men forgot,
 And tolerated their inhuman lot ?

Where is your gold ? Thrown out upon the wind
 With precious lives, a thin blue trail of smoke
 That curls and writhes, until upon the mind
 Is etched a vision serpentine to cloak
 The clearer vision that shall free mankind
 And cast aside their bitter burning yoke.
 The smoke still trails, still darkening their eyes
 That ache to see and peer up in the skies.

A blind man tapping through a burning town,
 Not seeing how it casts a splendid glare
 Upon the sky, a golden russet brown,
 Of danger through his nostrils well aware,
 Turns as a huge rich house comes toppling down
 And faces it with vacant, frosty stare.
 He feels the thrill of terror in the crowd,
 And knows their thoughts as though they thought aloud.

The soul of man, whose eyes have been plucked out
 Lest they should see too much, walks sniffing so.
 The fabric of his mind is gutted out
 And very soon its massive walls will go.
 And round the conflagration and about
 Are men and women spell-bound by the glow.
 They stand there huddled, gaping and obscene,
 Forgetting all the greatness there has been.

They watch the sparks fly upward. There are priests
 Among them who remind them how they too
 Are born to sorrow and, unlike the beasts,
 Fly upward, if to Church and God they're true.
 And there are thieves to whom such crowds are feasts,
 Wherein the god of stealing has his due.
 And many thieves authority will ape,
 And pick the people's pockets while they gape.

And there are quacks who sell in printed sheets
 Elaborate accounts of how the burning
 Goes east to west, then in the middle meets
 Another flare, goes west to east, then, turning,
 Goes north to south, and then again repeats
 Its first great sweep. And, with a show of learning
 These quacks will draw a simple diagram
 As cabalistic as the Crab or Ram.

And there are other quacks who undertake
 To put the burning out, if they are paid
 Enough. With high explosives then they slake
 The flames and soon they ply a roaring trade.
 And half the crowd they soon induce to make
 More high explosives, while other some are made
 To carry them into the fiercest heat,
 Returning whence, they're worshipped for the feat.

And soon the throng, half mad with fright and lust
 For added terrors, and the frenzied glee
 Of bringing outworn splendours to the dust,
 Turns on itself and whips up enmity
 And savage fury, till they break the crust
 Of habit and set beastly passions free.
 The throng now flares and flickers like the blaze.
 All hope, all life they set about to raze.

And strangely for this work they will submit
 To order and an iron discipline.
 In regiments and armies they are knit,
 And disobedience is mortal sin.
 Of every other thought and aim they're quit
 And wait the word their horror to begin.
 All life they cast aside and keep the lees.
 In lapping blood and filth they find their ease.

And as the flames consume their outward show,
 So terror burns them inwardly to ashes.
 There is no wind of thought to raise a glow,
 No pity tends their bleeding wounds and gashes.
 They trample men and women as they go.
 White skins are spotted o'er with bloody splashes.
 They catch or crush all in their mad career,
 Voluptuously screaming in their fear.

Hypocrisy is honoured as their lord,
 Who gives them gods and high time-honoured causes
 For which they can pretend to draw the sword
 And burn and wreck, and when the frenzy pauses
 Demand that all shall be of one accord
 And sign the self-same false and lying clauses,
 To prove this vileness done for Freedom's charter
 And grant the dead the honour of a martyr.

Hypocrisy itself cannot control
 Their fury, and hypocrisy's devices
 Are trampled down and nothing is left whole
 Except a few primeval human vices.
 These are allowed to play their ancient rôle,
 The serpent who seduces and entices.
 All else is swept into the holocaust,
 The human mind they ransack and exhaust.

And when they grow accustomed to their fear
 'Tis all done cheerfully and almost lightly.
 Their horror seems to lose its power to sear
 And they are used to all their foul unsightly
 Abominations, though they still seem queer,
 And there are rules to see that they're done rightly.
 Now shuddering, the blinded soul refuses
 To share one moment more and seeks the Muses.

Out of the glare, out of the mortal din
 He gropes his way to unpolluted air.
 He washes out the memory of sin
 In peaceful streams and starting from its lair
 Imagination seeks therewith to win,
 In spite of all the dangers he must dare,
 His way to that sweet flower-dappled hill
 Whereon the Muses magic arts distil.

There he will crave that they upon his eyes
 Shall lay some juices rare to heal his sight,
 That once again sweet visions may arise
 And beckon him to taste true love's delight,
 Deep penetrating love that laughs at lies
 As insects born to perish in the night.
 So while mankind is caught in lust and rage
 The soul sets out on happy pilgrimage.

The world's well lost and hardly worth a sigh
 Save that its end has been so dearly bought.
 The bravest men have been condemned to die
 And taken with them all they might have thought
 And felt and done. Their lives have been thrown by
 Before they could discover what they sought.
 Not death but men were merciless and cruel
 To use their lives so wantonly as fuel.

All is laid waste, the good and bad together.
The good went first, a willing sacrifice,
A sweet meek beast there was no need to tether.
The bad still stood and bargained for its price,
Still hoping it were possible to weather
The storm by some ingenious device.
But even the most subtle hypocrite
Could find no way of keeping out of it.

For all must see their dearly hoarded treasure,
The sweet unquestioned goods of yesterday,
Go down before the Procrustean measure
That values all, but as it fits the play
Of evil forces sweeping at their pleasure
The gods and men and governments away.
And so with accents properly funereal
We ope our epic Liberal-Imperial.



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